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GENERATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE *WENDE*: INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCE
AND THE LAST GENERATION OF THE GDR

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Humanities

by

Jill H. Jackson
BSJ, Ohio University, 1998

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Jill H. Jackson ENTITLED Generational Identity and the *Wende*: Institutional Influence and the Last Generation of the GDR BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Humanities.

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Abstract

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Generational Identity and the *Wende*: Institutional Influence and the Last Generation of the GDR

Political and cultural institutions of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) shaped generational identity before and after Germany's *Wende*, or reunification. This thesis considers two memoirs, *Zonenkinder* and *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, which were published after reunification and written by members of the GDR's last generation. Contextualizing their memoirs in the context of the GDR's political culture illustrates the degree to which memories are mediated by external factors and how in the confrontations with external assessments, portrayals emerge that focus on peculiarities rather than unifying features. Depictions of significant moments from the formative years of these authors demonstrate how social memories provide a unique way of communicating. Furthermore, these memoirs illustrate how historical representations may be exclusionary and the consequences of historical narratives that are narrowly linked to ideology. This study also reveals the benefit of memory discourse as it relates to commemorative celebrations and determining future models of national identity.

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An Introduction to Aleida Assmann's Memory Formats and the Memoirs *Zonenkinder* and *Meine Freie Deutsche Jugend*

Authors of memoirs carefully tailor their depictions in an effort to either support or challenge an accepted historiography (Assmann, "Transformations" 59). History is reimagined as they write their place into it or revisit the expectations they once had for the future. As an edition of the past, a memoir may be written with an intention to authenticate contemporary attitudes and shifting historical narratives or debunk them. An attachment to historical events or an association to historical figures grounds the authors' individual memories into a familiar reality to which the reader can readily connect. The social and political changes that swept across Eastern Europe during the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 as Communism collapsed, the Berlin Wall fell, and the formerly divided Germany reunited have become a rich source of inspiration for authors and artists. That year of intense change, 1989/90, is referred to as the *Wende* or "turning point" in Germany (Leeder 216). Drawing from personal experience, authors who were teenagers at the time of the *Wende* responded to the emerging consequences of the era with personal reflections and generation-specific anecdotes (Magenau and Voelkner 99). Novels and memoirs about growing up in the divided Germany, especially from the perspective of former East Germany (the German Democratic Republic, GDR), proliferated in the years following the *Wende*. This era coincided with the early 2000s, when popular entertainment featured retrospective television programs that focused on the pop-culture of a bygone era (Cook 135). When this type of nostalgic entertainment focused on life in the former GDR, it was deemed "*Ostalgie*," a combination of the German word *Ost* (East) and *Nostalgie* (nostalgia) (Thesz "Adolescence" 107). Critics

found fault with reminiscent depictions of the GDR's history asserting that these types of portrayals trivialized the deep-seated institutional corruption (Cook 136). And although they claimed that some of the authors had "selective amnesia" when writing about the GDR, "idealizing it as a land uncontaminated by capitalism's vicious individualism" (Cook 124), supporters of *Ostalgie* saw it as a means to provide balance to the assumption that the GDR was the "abject other" to the West (Cook 136). Depictions of youth culture provide insight into the attachments individuals have to the past and how an ignored or excluded experience can be reclaimed through the retrospection of a generation.

It is the purpose of this study to critically consider two memoirs that were published within the first fifteen years after Germany's reunification: Jana Hensel's 2002 *Zonenkinder (Children of the Zone)* and Claudia Rusch's 2003 *Meine freie deutsche Jugend (My Free German Youth)*. Memoirs provide insight into the intervening factors that mediate and influence memories: history, politics, and institutions. As Hensel and Rusch depict everyday life in the GDR, they distill their generation's uniqueness and demonstrate the interruptive effect that the *Wende* had on the process of adolescent self-reflection, especially as familiar institutional signifiers used to structure identity became obsolete. Additionally, these memoirs codify what it meant to be of the "vierte Generation der DDR" (fourth generation of the GDR; Caspari 205)¹, or what became its last, distinguishing it from proceeding generations and from their peers of former West Germany. The resulting narratives reveal how they perceived themselves, especially in

¹ In this thesis there are numerous German language source materials, for which I provide the translations.

comparison to others. I will discuss how features of these generational memoirs illustrate not only what the authors found meaningful from their childhood in the GDR, but the effectiveness of GDR institutions in influencing political and cultural memory and generational identity.

Distinctions among various “memory formats” are essential to understand in order to illustrate the relationship between memory and identity. For this study, I will use the terminology refined by Aleida Assmann and the distinctions that separate individual, social, political, and cultural memory. Beginning with individual memory, these are the moments of an individual’s life that are perceived from a singular unique perspective and known only to the person who lives the experience. They are “episodic,” and Assmann contends that these individual memories are not “transferable” (“Memory” 212). But in order to instill lived experiences with meaning, people connect individual “idiosyncratic” experiences into larger historical narratives. It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that autobiographical memoirs are replete with social memory rather than individual memories, but this is how memories become accessible and relatable. The association of one’s personal experiences to a larger historical narrative is necessary in order to discuss events and impart value to these specific moments. Without an association or “emplotment” into a larger historical framework, the stories remain merely anecdotal. Assmann borrows the terms “emplotment” and “emplot” from literary philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who wrote extensively on the interconnectedness of “time, narrative, and human identity” (Crowley 1). To emplot a memory is to relate it or attach the personal memory to the larger structure of contemporary events, providing it with an external significance. Although personal memories are “fragmented and random...[they] never exist in

complete isolation but are connected to a wider network of other memories and, what is even more important, the memories of others” (Assmann, “Memory” 213). The distinction then, between individual memories and social memories is associative in nature. If an individual joins personal recollections into a larger historical narrative and then shares these experiences with others, they cease to be exclusively individual memories.

Two important variables arise when individual memories are emploted into a larger historical narrative and become social memory. First, with whom does one share memories? Assmann asserts that social memories are typically shared amongst an “age cohort” or generation (“Memory” 214). Referencing the work of sociologist Karl Mannheim, she explains that generational memory is important because “as a group of more or less the same age that has witnessed the same incisive historical events, generations share a common frame of beliefs, values, habits, and attitudes” (“Memory” 214). For this generation, the *Wende* conflated loss of childhood and the loss of their *Herkunftsraum* (place of origin; Caspari 205). The reunification process did not elicit a unified sense of generational identity between the contemporaries from the East and West, but rather the dissimilarities between the former GDR and its Western counterpart, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), became pronounced generational indicators. Illustrating the somewhat paradoxical effect unification had on this generation, former East German author Ingo Schulz commented, “only in the 1990s did I become East German” (Jaeger 152). The familiar past, even as it faded from relevance, provided a way for members of this generation to communicate among themselves in their present circumstances.

The geographic, political, and social borders of Hensel's childhood are represented in the title *Zonenkinder*, as it alludes to the physical territory that she and her generation inhabited in the GDR. But after the *Wende*, she alleges that the former GDR was transformed into a "kontaminierten Raum" ("contaminated space"; 155) into which people would venture only to either profit from it or to study it. But Hensel requisitioned this *Raum* for herself and her peers. *Zone* became a term of endearment; it no longer referred only to the physical space of the former GDR, but to the abstract space of shared memories and stories. Rather than accepting external perceptions or assessments, Hensel established an inside perspective through her detailed memories of life in the GDR and assisted in creating her generation's identity.

For the title to her memoir *Meine freie deutsche Jugend*, Rusch added the possessive adjective *meine* in front of the name of the GDR's official teen organization *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth, FDJ). In this context *meine* means "my" and its placement creates a thoughtful juxtaposition between the role of the individual and the role of the institutional organizations in the former GDR. Her intended meaning is ambiguous; it perhaps references how a child was subordinate to the goals of the state (Bach 339), or it could be that after the *Wende*, she claimed her youth back from the state yet acknowledged its formative presence. Either interpretation of Rusch's title demonstrates the institutional influence on this generation's experiences and further explicates the connection between individual and social memory.

The second variable to consider when discussing memory emplotment is the function of existing historical narratives. A brief excursion into post-war German history will illustrate how different historical narratives arise and how wide the division can be.

After World War II, the ideological split between the three Western allies (the United States, France, and England) and the Soviet Union manifested itself in post-war policies. The Western allies promoted a democratic government with a capitalist economy in the FRG. The Soviet Union promoted communism, which they claimed was the most assured opponent to fascism (Verbeeck 69). This ideological claim was essential to the formation of the GDR's largest political party, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland*, SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), and determined the nation's historical narrative, which in turn was used to provide "legitimization" to the party (Penny 343). The imperative of history to provide the SED with validity yielded educational and cultural policies that relied on emotionally charged, homogeneous propaganda (Penny 347). Successive generations participated in the "collective identification" of the GDR through diverse media, such as film and literature, and in public ceremonies celebrating rites of initiation or commemoration. "*History* turns into *memory* when it is transformed into forms of shared knowledge and collective identification and participation" (Assmann "Memory" 216). The tenets of the SED's political ideology, which it attempted to justify through a historical framework, informed how the citizens remembered their personal histories. Collective memory, structured through indoctrination and propaganda, shifts an impersonal national history to the public's acceptance of it as *their* history (Assmann "Memory" 216). In the course of SED's administration, the leadership focused on different aspects of GDR's history to substantiate changes in policy (Penny 352), but these moves hardly compared to the dramatic upheaval of the *Wende*, in which the familiar historical script of the GDR was challenged and replaced with a new narrative.

The manner in which politics affects memory is not limited though to how one associates individual memories to a particular historical record. Assmann sorts the four previously mentioned memory formats (individual, social, political and cultural) into two categories. The first category, which includes individual and social memory, is comprised of memories that a person creates through first-hand, lived experience. The second category, which includes political and cultural memory, is made up of mediated memories. She explains that “institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, states, the church, or a firm do not ‘have’ a memory; they ‘make’ one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments” (“Memory” 216). These are not unique methods of the former GDR, but rather common practices to strengthen group identity among political, social, military, or religious entities. In chapter one, I will discuss how the politics of the GDR exploited these methods of mediation and encroached into the personal and social lives of its citizens because it “was a regime with totalitarian aspirations” (Eidlin 105). Endeavoring to control tightly its population, a comprehensive network of institutions was established to reinforce the national identity. For example, the goal of the SED’s Educational Ministry was the “Erziehung zur sozialistischen Persönlichkeit” (“education for the socialist personality”; Geißler), which undertook to deliver a unified version of their national image through their population’s youngest citizens. Additionally, SED leadership encouraged participation in the *Ernst Thälmann Pionierorganisation* (Ernst Thälmann Pioneer Organization) and the *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, two youth organizations in the GDR that promoted socialist values and allegiance. Hensel relates the responsibility she felt to her nation as a member of the Pioneers:

Ich war einer der jüngsten Staatsbürger der jungen DDR und sollte den Sozialismus weiterbringen, damit er vielleicht doch noch, eines fernen Tages zum Kommunismus würde. (I was one of the youngest citizens of the young GDR and should advance socialism, so that one day it perhaps would still become communism; 85).

Earnest recollections such as this demonstrate the lasting impression the GDR left upon children, as they were expected to fulfill the nation's legacy. Revisiting moments, culling through them, and assigning meaning to them is a "retrograde strategy" within social memory construction (Assmann "Memory" 213). As Hensel and Rusch look to the past for context and meaning, their memoirs provide an opportunity to consider the social, political, and historical circumstances of their youth.

In chapter two, I will evaluate how the authors' memoirs represent their generation's "struggle for recognition" (Honneth 31) and how the memoirs depend on the distinctions between generational, political, and cultural differences for context, especially as they found themselves in opposition to their parents' generation, to the West, and to capitalist excess. Although it is typical that parent-child dynamics change over time, the *Wende* brought into focus the cultural, material, and political differences that began to emerge between these two generations. During the forty-year history of the GDR, a sense of duty provided clear expectations to East Germans, but former obligations became obsolete as the younger generation's receptiveness to new freedoms, Western ideas, and products outpaced its parents' acceptance of Western influence.

The persisting divide between the East and West provides a second distinguishing factor for this generation. Both Hensel and Rusch describe how the scarcity of consumer

products in the GDR informed their perceptions of the West. After the *Wende*, they attempted to reconcile their attitudes toward Western commodification, in light of the *Erziehung zur sozialistischen Persönlichkeit* they experienced as children. The availability of Western merchandise was accompanied by the disappearance of products from the East. This loss of the familiar was followed by a renewed intensity to retain some of the distinctly East German peculiarities, informing the *Ostalgie* culture that emerged ten to fifteen years after the *Wende*. The unsettled relationship between identity and consumer culture as illustrated in Hensel's and Rusch's memoirs reflects the challenges this generation experienced in understanding itself and in making itself understandable to others.

In the third chapter, I will consider how time mediates memories and how they create expectations for future identity and action. The relationship between history, memory, and identity reveals underlying discrepancies in power dynamics. Hensel and Rusch both wrote additional books about life in the regions of the former GDR after the *Wende*, in which they consider the continued strain of identity politics on the tenuous success of reunification. Using these more recent publications also assists in understanding their initial goals for their memoirs. The 2018 book *Wer Wir Sind: Die Erfahrung Ostdeutsch zu sein* (*Who We Are: The Experience of Being East German*) co-authors Jana Hensel and Wolfgang Engler address questions of identity and power as they relate to the GDR. They reject external depictions about the East German experience and suggest that without a robust representation of perspectives from inside the former GDR, exclusionary power dynamics will persist.

Rusch revisits the East twenty years after the *Wende* in her book *Aufbau Ost: Unterwegs zwischen Zinnowitz und Zwickau (Constructing the East: Along the Way Between Zinnowitz and Zwickau, 2009)*. Her recent writings assist my discussion on the continued relevance of Germany's historical divisions, especially as it relates to the contemporary political issue in Germany of right-wing extremism. Her response to Western criticisms of East German culture allows for a further examination of the consequences of historical narrations that exclude, marginalize, or oversimplify circumstances.

Chapter 1

The GDR's Historical Narrative and Institutions

Historical annals and chronicles document events in a non-narrative manner and focus primarily on objective facts such as dates, key figures, and geography. These types of histories, which are mostly free of commentary, explanation, or subjective frameworks, have been replaced with historiographies that provide coherency and meaning in carefully crafted narratives for successive generations (White 3). Although narratives still rely on actual events, they include subjective descriptions and interpretations of events. In this thesis, the term “historical narratives” will refer to the meaningful connections and conclusions that are assigned to a chronology of events and provide not only coherency to historical events, but also reflect political attitudes of an era (Gallie 105, White 4). After WWII, historians had the opportunity to ascribe meaning to the war and its precipitous conditions in ways that corresponded to specific political ideologies and agendas through their narrations of history (Brockman 37). Of the competing views of history that emerged from post-war Europe, the GDR had its own official history (Pritchard 206). In this chapter I will provide an overview of the GDR's historical narrative and the institutions created to promote its version of history. This is an important step to provide context for Hensel's and Rusch's memoirs as I consider how they not only inform generational identity but reflect the influence of the SED's institutions. There are two aspects of narration which benefit from consideration in this chapter: how and why the GDR narrated its history, and how the institutions of the GDR, as means to propagate its version of history, informed Hensel's and Rusch's narrations of their memoirs.

The Soviet-Occupied Zone after WWII and the establishment of the SED

After Germany's unconditional surrender, the leaders of the Western Allies and the Soviet Union convened for the Potsdam conference in July 1945 in order to finalize the borders of the four sectors that would divide the former German Republic and to discuss the post-war issues of reparations, demilitarization, and denazification (Jarausch 7). The question of how to eliminate Nazism from Germany demonstrated an ideological divide between the Western powers and the Soviet Union and exposed their "beliefs about the reasons for Nazism's triumph" (Brockman 37). The Soviets rooted their historiography of WWII to Germany's interbellum years (1918-1933) when "fascism and bolshevism were facing each other as in a civil war" (Diner 126). After the Nazi party took control of the Reichstag in 1933, the leaders of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschland*, KPD (Communist Party of Germany), went into political exile in Moscow and remained there until the war's end in 1945 (Lemmons 344). After Germany surrendered, they returned to the Soviet-occupied zone of eastern Germany, which would become the GDR, to enact the post-war policies, which not only informed the foundational years of the GDR, but also had a lasting influence on its social, political, and economic conditions. True to its Bolshevistic ethos, the Soviet's perspective focused on its ideological opposite, fascism, to attach much of the war's blame. The militaristic and economic policies of fascism permitted the "imperialist aggression" of the National Socialist Party during WWII (Diner 125). The Soviets claimed a victory not only of military might, but an "ethical" one as well, as its ideological principles were directly opposed to fascism (Diner 125).

Also implicated in how to handle denazification was to plan “the nature of the state in which they lived or hoped to live” (Brockman 37). This corresponds for example, to the American, British, and French spheres of influence, which required that the German public be “re-educated” with democratic values to encourage nation building that would eventually reflect the same values and economics structures of the West (Philips 577). But in the Soviet-occupied Zone in the East, the communist leaders established the groundwork for this region to become a communist satellite state and asserted that the “the most effective way to ensure that Nazism would never again triumph in Germany was to fight for socialism” (Brockman 38). In an effort to build a block party that could unite the working class, the Communist leaders merged the KPD with the *Sozialistische Partei Deutschland*, SPD, (Socialist Democratic Party of Germany), which became the GDR’s dominant political party, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland*, SED, (the Socialist Unity Party of Germany; Pritchard 108, 148).

East Germany was a one-party state and the SED remained in control until the GDR was dissolved in 1990 (Major 257). It based its *Führungsanspruch* (claim to leadership; Völkel 108) on the importance that Marxism-Leninism attaches to the working class and made the workers the most powerful social class in the GDR (Völkel 108). The SED relied on the omnipresent *Nationale Front der DDR*, NF (National Front of the GDR), which was the supervisory head of all large organizations, to ensure its claim to power (Palmowski 17). As a link between state and society, the NF was “das breiteste und umfassendste Bündnis aller politischen und sozialen Kräfte des Volkes unter der Führung der Arbeiterklasse und deren Partei, der SED” (“the broadest and most encompassing association of all political and social forces of the people, under the

leadership of the working class and their party, the SED”; Völkel 112). The NF consisted of such organizations as the *Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschland* (Democratic Farmers’ Party), the *Christliche Demokratische Union* (Christian Democratic Union), the *Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (Free German Trade Union), and the *Demokratische Frauenbund Deutschland* (Democratic Women’s League of Germany) and provided a guise of inclusion while the SED maintained exclusive control. In order to be the “Rettung der deutschen Nation” (“salvation of the German Nation”; Völkel 112), the National Front provided the link between the political and social organizations and supported the creation of the *Kulturbundes der DDR*, KB (The Cultural Association of the GDR). This alliance was established by former KPD member Johannes Becher and maintained that culture and politics should “complement each other” and would be instrumental in “promoting the heritage of German classicism, a heritage that communist leaders...believed had been betrayed by the Nazis” (Brockman 42, 43). The resultant initiatives of the KB’s policies were “necessarily tendentious” (Stephan 75) supporting the SED’s claim that by quelling the possibility of resurgent fascism, the goal of Socialism could be realized. And although these many organizations influenced the GDR’s citizens, it was the compulsory educational system of the GDR and its auxiliary organizations that delivered the most comprehensive indoctrination.

The Socialist Personality: The Goal of the GDR Educational System

In order to eliminate any residual influence from the years of Nazi control, the SED expelled any teachers that had been active during the previous regime and then undertook the “education of the educators” according to its anti-fascist, socialist principles (Stephen 74). The goal of the “staatlich geförderte Erziehungspraxis” (“state-

structured educational system”; Israel) was to develop the “sozialistischen Persönlichkeiten” (“socialist personalities”; Rudolph 328) of its students and build the socialist state. The use of the term *Erziehung* is indicative of this comprehensive role the state played in the formative years of children in the GDR. Although closely associated with the term *Bildung*, which refers to education focused on knowledge acquisition and the development of practical skills, *Erziehung* differs slightly and refers to the role parents typically play in shaping a child’s morality and socialization (Hörner et al 12). In the GDR it was typical for both parents to work,² and as a result children as young as six-months old spent their days in state-run *Kinderkrippen* (daycare centers; Israel). Instead of receiving individual attention at this young age, these children were introduced to the *Gruppenerziehung* (group education), which conditioned them to the importance of being part of the collective (Israel). Every year that a child progressed through the educational system, curriculum reinforced the antifascist heritage and the importance of the *Arbeiterklasse* (the working class). In the 1960s, the *Ministerin für Volksbildung* (Minister of Education) Margot Honecker explained that the elementary and secondary schools consciously supported the “Festigung der politischen Macht der Werktätigen, die unter der Führung der Arbeiterklasse und ihrer marxistisch-leninistischen Partei den Sozialismus verwirklichen“ (“consolidation of political power of the working people who, under the leadership of the working class and their Marxist-Leninist party, are realizing socialism”; qtd. in Rudolph 329). Just as the SED used history to legitimate its claim to power, the educational system would return to the anti-fascist rhetoric to support

² The GDR’s 1949 constitution gave men and women equal employment rights, but some suggest that this “equality” was designed only to equip the post-war economy with sufficient labor so as not to rely on guest workers from other countries rather than actual equal opportunities for women (Fuhrer).

its goal of “realizing socialism.” The legacy of these policies enacted decades before can be seen in Hensel’s account of her anti-fascist identity:

Im Geschichtsunterricht unserer Kindheit waren wir Antifaschisten. Unsere Großeltern, unsere Eltern, die Nachbarn – alle waren Antifaschisten (In our history lessons during our childhood, we were all anti-fascists. Our grandparents, parents, neighbors-everyone was anti-fascist; Hensel 108).

She indicates that anti-fascism was not only part of her education, but also a common denominator of intergenerational identity in the GDR. These history lessons perhaps informed how she imagined the future citizens of the GDR in uniform opposition to the Nazi-fascists during WWII:

Sooft ich mir als Kind den Zweiten Weltkrieg vorstellte, waren deshalb alle irgendwie Mitglieder der Weißen Rose oder trafen sich konspirativ in Hinterhöfen und Kellern, um den Widerstand zu organisieren und Flugblätter zu drucken. Der Krieg hatte in unserem Land nicht stattgefunden. (So often as a kid, when I imagined WWII, somehow everyone was a member of the White Rose Society or met clandestinely in back alleys and basements, in order to organize a resistance or to print pamphlets. The war had not taken place in our country; 108).

Hensel reveals how problematic the GDR’s anti-fascist narrative became, as it created “an identity that was opposed to the fascist experience of its German population...and this identity functioned predominantly as a way of denying the actual national socialist [Nazi] past” (Diner 123). For forty years, the GDR maintained its version of history, which in order to legitimate its claim to power and authority focused on the political and

economic victims of the Nazi's party's policies, not on those who were victimized because of race and ethnicity (Diner 130).

Immediately after WWII, policymakers in the FRG focused on the atrocities of the Nazi dictatorship (Raim 548). But unlike the GDR's anti-fascism rhetoric, which originates from a communist point of view, the FRG's denazification policies were informed by the "theory of totalitarianism which compares and even equates fascism and communism" (Wipperman 191,192). The Jewish victims of National Socialism's extreme ideology did not fade from view in the West's engagement with the past as it developed policies to prevent a resurgent autocracy (Raim 548). Although there are several elements of the West's handling of Holocaust victims and Nazi war criminals that are not beyond reproach (Raim 548-549), the differences between the GDR and FRG and what became apparent after the *Wende*, was the degree to which the historical narrative in the GDR chose ideology over accuracy.

Hensel's outlook on Germany's history changed a few years after reunification when her social circle included a group of friends that had grown up in the FRG. They related how they learned of their grandparents' activities during the war. Her friend Moritz revealed that his grandfather had been not only a member of the Nazi party, but "ein ranghoher, entscheidungsbefugter Amtsträger" ("a high-ranking official, permitted to give orders"; 110). As she listened to more stories from her friends from the West, Hensel remained silent, as she had nothing to contribute; she knew nothing of what her grandparents actually had done during the war. This was a consequence, she realized, for her and her peers in the East, because "wir wurden als Gegenwartsgeneration in einen Vergangenheitsstaat hineingeboren, der uns Fragen und unschöne Geschichten

abgenommen hatte” (“we were a modern generation born into a former state, which had alleviated us of questions and of an ugly history”; 112). It seems then, by her account, that the GDR’s educational system succeeded during her childhood in getting her to participate in this collective construction of “national memory” (Assmann, “Memory” 216), but it took the effects of the *Wende* for her to see the consequences of her education.

Navigating the relationship between anti-fascism and the socialist personality was a challenging undertaking, especially for a child. In 1978 when Claudia Rusch was in the fourth grade, protesters in the GDR demonstrated against the NATO’s plan to build up missiles in Europe to fortify defenses against the Soviet’s expanding nuclear armaments (Curry16). Initially the protests were tolerated in the GDR due to their anti-American undercurrents, but the regime pushed back when East German protesters became critical of the Soviets as well. The slogan of the protest movement became “Schwerter zu Pflugscharen” (“Swords into plowshares”; Rusch *Meine* 35), which was an allusion not only to the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, but to the title of a sculpture created by the Soviet artist Yevgeny Vuchetich (Rusch *Meine* 35). The sculpture, which symbolized “man's desire to put an end to war and convert the means of destruction into creative tools for the benefit of all mankind,” was presented to the UN as a gift from the Soviet Union in 1957 (“Let Us Beat”). Demonstrators, attuned to the hypocrisy of the Soviet administration and the GDR’s support of the Soviet’s nuclear arsenal, attached patches featuring a depiction of Vuchetich’s sculpture to their jackets. Rusch’s politically engaged mother sewed one of these patches to her young daughter’s jacket and sent her to school. Rusch recounts her first-hand experience with the aftereffect:

Herr Petzke [der Lehrer der Klasse] also ließ mich vor die Klasse treten und hielt einen Vortrag darüber, warum die Friedensbewegung in Wirklichkeit die Konterrevolution und der Aufnäher westdeutsche Propaganda sei und ich mich damit deutlichst als Klassenfeind enttarnt hätte. Ich wollte, so schloss er, das Ende der DDR und damit den Faschismus zurück. (Mr. Petzke [the class' teacher] had me come before the class, and then lectured about why the peace movement was actually a counterrevolution and the arm-patch was a piece of West German propaganda, and with it I had clearly been revealed as an enemy of the class. What I wanted, he concluded, was the end of the GDR and with it, the return of fascism; *Meine* 37).

In his diatribe, Rusch's teacher succinctly maligned the West, invoked a reference to the GDR's anti-fascist narrative, and illustrated how little it takes to become a *Klassenfeind*. When he pressed the students in the class to comment on the peace demonstration, one of Rusch's classmates chided: "Wenn das Ernst Thälmann wüsste, dann würde er sich im Grab umdrehen" ("If Ernst Thälmann knew that, then he would be turning over in his grave"; *Meine* 38). To invoke the name of the communist folk hero and eponym of the Thälmann Pioneers demonstrates the persisting link between the anti-fascist narrative and the communist narrative. Thälmann, who was considered an "unantastbare Heiland" ("untouchable savior"; Rusch *Meine* 38) in the GDR, was a political prisoner at the Nazi's concentration camp Buchenwald and the subject of two popular films produced by the *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft*, DEFA (The German Film Company of the GDR) in the early 1950s. The DEFA's films reinforced the SED's construction of history (Allan 56) and its depictions of Thälmann as a crusader for the German workers' movement,

dedicated communist, and friend of the Soviets (Lemmons 344). He was the embodiment of the ideal for which children in the GDR were to strive.

The central role the educational institutions played in the lives of young people was not limited to the classroom. Although membership to these organizations was officially voluntary, the SED strongly encouraged students beginning in the first grade to join the *Jungpioniere* (young pioneers), then graduate to the *Thälmann-Pioniere* (Thälmann pioneers) in the fourth grade, and then in the eighth grade, join the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Kerbel). These groups complemented the classroom curriculum in reaching its socialist goals by focusing on the organization as a collective and emphasizing the GDR's claims, that it was committed to peace and human rights (Kerbel). Hensel relates her earnestness as a member of the *Thälmann-Pioniere* and how imperative it was to protect the socialist legacy as part of a collective:

So wie Erich Honecker und seine Genossen ins Zuchthaus mussten, weil sie dafür gekämpft hatten, dass von deutschem Boden nie wieder ein Krieg ausgehe, so durften wir das kostbare sozialistische Erbe nicht leichtsinnig aus den Händen geben. Gleich dem Arbeiter an der Drehbank, dem Bauer auf dem Mähdrescher und dem Volkspolizist am Fahrdamm gelobten wir Schüler, nach hoher Bildung und Kultur zu streben und unser Wissen und Können für die Verwirklichung der großen humanistischen Ideale einzusetzen. (Just like Erich Honecker and his comrades had to go to the penitentiary because they had fought to ensure that war would never again spring from German soil, so we could not recklessly give up the precious socialist legacy. Like the worker on the lathe, the farmer on the combine harvester, and the police officer on the levee, we the students pledged to

strive for a high level of education and culture and to utilize our knowledge and skills for the attainment of the great humanistic ideals; 86).

Her description of her membership in the *Pioniere* effectively communicates the influence that SED had on her worldview and its role in the fight for the socialist ideal. It was the working class of *Arbeiter* and *Bauer* that realized socialism in the GDR, as long as it was accompanied by a figure of authority, *Volkspolizist*. In referencing the incarceration of Erich Honecker, second General Secretary of the SED from 1971 until 1989 (Palmowski 109), Hensel narrates her memory very similarly to the GDR's approach. She doesn't focus on his policies contemporary to her life, but rather alludes to the decade that Honecker spent in prison after being arrested by the Gestapo in 1935, where he "claimed to have survived the Third Reich penitentiary by faith in Marx and strength of character" (Jaraus 57). Just as the GDR focused on its anti-fascist roots to justify a socialist state, so too does Hensel. This is less of a memory and more of a continuance of the GDR's official history.

Jugendweihe: An Initiation to the SED

The socialist system repressed religious participation and affiliation (Froese and Pfaff 401; Gautier 289), therefore the SED leadership party overtook this void in moral authority. When teens were in their eighth year of school, they typically participated in the *Jugendweihe* (Youth Dedication), which was not a religious event in the GDR, but mirrored the Protestant Confirmation ceremony that celebrates an adolescent's decision to formerly join the church as an adult member. This ceremony was the culminating event for an FDJ membership when they swore "allegiance" to the SED (Emmerich 16):

Wir gelobten,...dass wir uns immer für die große Sache des Sozialismus einsetzen, den Bruderband mit der Sowjetunion vertiefen und im Geiste des proletarischen Internationalismus kämpfen würden (We professed, that we would always stand up for the great cause of Socialism, deepen our fraternal bond with the Soviet Union, and we would fight in the spirit of proletarian internationalism; Hensel 93-94).

And even though Rusch describes the *Jugendweihe* in a playful manner as “eine Kreuzung aus Konfirmation und Debütantinnenball” (“a cross between confirmation and a debutante’s ball”), she recalls it as “ein bedeutsamer Moment” (“a significant moment”) when she was accepted into the “Kreis der Erwachsenen” (“community of adults”; *Meine* 47). Her *Jugendweihe* was celebrated at the *Museum für Deutsche Geschichte*, MfDG (Museum of German History), which although she mentioned only briefly, played a substantial role in articulating the GDR’s official historical narrative. When MfDG opened in the early 1950’s after major renovations to repair war damage, it became the “power base for Marxist-Leninist historians, acted as central organ for history in the GDR, and set the tone for both academic research and popular education concerning German history” (Penny 347). Exhibits that promoted these objectives would have served as an effective backdrop for the pomp of a *Jugendweihe* and bolstered the objectives of continual legitimation of the SED, through its history and future generations of allegiant party members.

A typical gift for someone celebrating the *Jugendweihe* was the book *Vom Sinn unseres Lebens* (*On the Meaning of Life*; Palmowski 132, footnote 95). The book was designed to provide guidance as a celebrant moved forward in their life as an adult

member of the socialist state and to provide answers to life's big questions: "Wer bin ich? Was kann ich? Was will ich? Wem nütze ich? Wer braucht mich?" (Who am I? What am I able to do? What do I want? To whom can I be useful? Who needs me?"; Hensel 94). The answers it provided were unequivocal and supported the "marxistisch-leninistische Weltanschauung" ("Marxist- Leninist worldview"; Hensel 94). At the time, Hensel loved the directness of the answers such as "Verantwortungsbewusstsein und Pflichtgefühl gegenüber der Gesellschaft" ("a sense of responsibility and duty towards society"; 94) that it provided. But after the *Wende* she thought about how different the answers would be if a post-reunification version of the book *Vom Sinn des Lebens* was published and she reflected with relief that no one would be answering the questions for her any longer (108).

Hensel intimated that shortly before the *Wende*, authoritative answers were already starting to elude her. She begins her memoir with her experience attending a Monday night demonstration in Leipzig. Beginning as weekly prayer meetings at St. Nicholas Church in the early 1980's, these demonstrations grew in attendance as the "popular mood" in the GDR was changing, partially in response to the fraudulent voting activities, which were exposed in May of 1989, and the Soviet Union's reluctance to engage in the domestic matters of its "client states" (Curry 19, 21). She captures the feeling of an uncertain future, in spite of knowing the outcome of events:

[ich] dachte wahrscheinlich zum ersten Mal in meinem Leben, dass mit dem Land, das immer meine Heimat gewesen war, gerade etwas geschah, von dem ich gar nicht wusste, was es war, und das gewiss kein Erwachsener mir erklären konnte, wohin es führen würde. (I probably thought for the first time in my life

that this country, which had always been my home, something is now happening, but which I really didn't understand what it was and that certainly no adult could explain to me where it would lead to; Hensel 13).

Unsettled as she was during this time of transition, Hensel was becoming aware that the institutions that had always directed her opinions and actions were disappearing. Just as the portraits of Erich Honecker and Vladimir Lenin disappeared from her classroom wall after the *Mauerfall* (14), so too did the authority and consistency of the history with which her generation was raised.

Nach der Wende (After Reunification)

Official historiography of the GDR as an anti-fascist state framed West Germany in “economic” and “historical continuity with fascism” (Diner 127). This supported the GDR’s claim that the FRG was “prone to return to fascist rule because of its capitalist social order” (Diner 127) and only in the GDR, where the “true” causes of the Nazism had been accurately identified and erased, would the prevention of fascism be effective. This “fictitious” (Diner 123) narration persisted for forty years, and “historians on both sides of the divide eyed each other with suspicion and ideological enmity” (Berger 63). During reunification, however, “cross-party” attempts were made to produce a unified perception of history, and in the early 1990’s these efforts suggested that agreement could be achieved (Gebauer 164). But cooperative efforts halted quickly when mutual “recriminations” were expressed (Berger 64). Soon historians from the GDR were excluded from major research institutions such as Research Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam and the Berlin branch of the Institute for Contemporary History and only historians from the former FRG held the top positions in the academic institutions

(Berger 65). The reasons for their exclusion varied from a so-called “qualitative difference” in historiography between the GDR and the FRG to the claim that the history in the GDR was “nothing more than propaganda” (Berger 65). Without a place in academic institutions to contribute to the new historiography, historians from the GDR began to participate “in a variety of historical associations and societies founded after 1990 to maintain scholarly networks of communication” (Berger 66). Many of these historical organizations were associated with the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (Party of Democratic Socialism), which was the successor party to the SED (Berger 66-67). Discordance between the East and West suggested that after reunification the previous divisions in the historical narrative would persist.

In 1992, the Bundestag established commissions to direct the process of reunification while dealing with the GDR’s history (McAdams and Torpey 2). It passed legislation in 1998 to create the *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (The Federal Foundation for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in East Germany: “Stiftungsauftrag“). It was tasked with analyzing the “Ursachen, Geschichte und Folgen der Diktatur in der SBZ und in der DDR” (“causes, history, and consequences of the dictatorship in the Soviet-occupied zone and the GDR”; “Fördergrundsätze“). Unlike the SED’s approach to creating a historical narrative through omitting details that were contradictory to party rhetoric (Brink 209), this foundation purports to keep “die Erinnerung an das geschehene Unrecht” (“the memory of injustice that occurred”) alive in order to “fördern und festigen” (“support and strengthen”) German Unity, Democracy and the “antitotalitären Konsens in der Gesellschaft” (“anti-totalitarian consensus in society”; “Fördergrundsätze“). Although this directive seems compatible with Western

historiography while also being inclusive of perspectives of the former GDR, it demonstrates how historical events continue to serve a political function. This new collaborative framework of Germany's history would interrupt this generation's collective memory, as their experiences that had been uniformly informed by the SED receded to the background and familiarity disappeared.

As Rusch and Hensel emploted their personal experiences to GDR's historical narrative, they reflected the deep roots of anti-fascism, which the SED used to justify its paradigm of moral superiority: the socialist personality. The institutional presence of the SED factored significantly in the lives of young GDR citizens and influenced their worldview and self-perceptions through early indoctrination, social organizations, and initiation rituals. In the next chapter, I will consider how these authors remember reunification and how the lack of the omnipresent institutions of their childhoods opened the way for them to consider how they perceived themselves in relationship to others.

Chapter 2

Defining Generational Identity

Extensive networks of institutions were used by SED to promote the “socialist personality.” However, the efficacy of such institutions to define *self* in a social-generational context was limited since the factors that influenced generational identity went beyond national politics, educational policies, and participation in clubs and youth organizations. Aspects that define an identity, either personal or generational, emerge in the context of an “other.” A cursory understanding of phenomenology suggests that we know ourselves in contrast or relation to other people (Hegel). One of the benefits of considering the formerly divided Germany for a study about the construction of identity is that although the GDR and FRG shared a common cultural heritage, language, and traditions, the deep ideological division resulted in a simultaneously emerging “otherness” from which comparisons about identity can be ascertained. In this chapter, the concept of “otherness” informs how I consider Hensel’s and Rusch’s memoirs. Rusch describes the members of her generation as the “die letzten echten Ossis. Und die ersten neuen Wessis” (“the last real Easterners. And the first new Westerners”; 101) and suggests they stood as a tenuous link between two politics, economies, and histories. Split between their socialist inculcation and new Western ideas, opportunities, and products, this generation seems to be unable to fully relate to either their parents’ generation or the “Partnergeneration im Westen” (“partner-generation in the West”; Hensel 156). Contextualizing the effect of the socialist economy of East Germany on their daily lives, Hensel and Rusch illustrate distinctive aspects of their generation. Their memories illustrate the complexities of navigating the new social terrain after reunification in light

of the former political and economic antagonism between the East and West and their effort to define themselves in relationship to these different social groups.

East vs. West: An Economic Divide

The rancor between the East and West complicated perceptions of the West after reunification, especially as the familiarity of the East disappeared and attitudes toward consumerism changed. Establishing itself as the ideological opposite to its so-called morally inferior neighbor to the West, the SED legitimated its political power not only in the narrative of anti-fascism, but in opposition to the West's capitalism (Eidlin 101). This opposition spurred the antagonistic exchange during the GDR's forty-year history, which intensified during the Cold War. For several years after WWII, leaders of the SED discussed a possible reunification with the West, treating the initial postwar divide as temporary (Penny 350). But with each passing year, the likelihood of reunification became less likely as both sides became entrenched in the Cold War and the SED's socialist policies intensified in response to domestic unease following the June uprising in 1953 (Major 65). Concomitant to the "socialist personality," the SED "denied agency to ordinary citizens, casting them as dupes of capitalist conspiracies...blinded by the façade of western shop window politics...and vulnerable to consumerism" (Major 63). With increased civil unrest and *Republikflucht* (defection) from the GDR, the SED built the Berlin Wall in August of 1961 (Major 143). The number of GDR citizens fleeing to the West suggests that the Wall was built to prevent an exodus. But the SED, in its continual emphasis on the anti-fascist narrative, purported that the building of the Berlin Wall was to prevent Western fascist influence from entering the East, therefore naming it the *antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (Antifascist Defense Rampart; Major 143). Even with the

SED's attempt to malign the FRG, the "golden West" served as a metric for quality of life for those living in the East (Major 51). In the years prior to the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Soviet ambassador to the GDR Mikhail Pervukhin remarked that "the uncontrolled border between the socialist and capitalist worlds...unwittingly prompts the population to make a comparison between both parts of the city" (qtd. in Major 51). Comparisons to the West would continue after the Wall's construction, as information provided through television and radio broadcasts from the West was accessible to most of East Germany except for those who lived in the *Tal der Anhangslosen*³ (Dittmar 327). The types of programs and the degree to which Western television and radio broadcasts informed the East-German audience is beyond the scope of this study. What is important to note though is that the abstract notion of the West, as either the vilified political opponent with "crass inequality" (Eidlin 101) or the pinnacle of luxury living, seemed to have left Hensel's and Rusch's generation perceiving aspects of the East and West with ambivalence.

In the GDR access to consumer goods was tightly controlled and the shortage of foodstuffs, especially fresh fruit, became a punch line to a popular joke⁴ (Rusch *Meine* 79). As Rusch claims: "Die Mangelwirtschaft hatte meine Kindheit geprägt" ("the economic scarcity impressed upon my childhood"; Rusch *Meine* 78). The citizens of the GDR were aware of the discrepancy, and ironically it was sometimes the anti-West propaganda that clued them into what they were missing. Jana Hensel grew up in the city Leipzig, which hosts the annual *Leipziger Messe* (Leipzig's trade show) and draws

³ This refers to the extreme northern and eastern corners of the GDR where Western broadcasts did not reach and was therefore referred to as the "Valley of the Clueless."

⁴ "Warum ist die Banane krumm? Weil sie einen Bogen um die DDR macht" (Why is the banana curved? Because it makes an arch around the GDR"; Rusch 79).

thousands of attendees from all across Germany and Europe (Major 188). Even during the years of Germany's division, the city hosted the trade show and representatives from the West attended. Prior to the event, Hensel and her classmates were instructed how to appropriately behave in the presence of Westerners:

Wir durften unsere Nasen nicht an die Scheiben der Westautos drücken und die Messegäste nicht um Flugtickets, Aufkleber, Ritter Sport, Wrigley's Spearmint oder Huba Buba anbetteln...So machten die Lehrer Westdeutschland für mich zu einem Land, in dem Erwachsene Kinder so liebten, dass sie stets Schokolade und Kaugummis in den Taschen trugen und ihnen auf offener Straße, anscheinend ohne darum gebeten werden zu müssen, davon abgaben. (We must not press our noses against the car windows of the Western cars and not beg the trade show guests for airline tickets, stickers, Ritter Sport, Wrigley's Spearmint or Hubba Bubba...In this way, the teacher made West Germany for me a place in which adults so loved children, that they always carried chocolate and chewing gum in their pockets and would hand it out on public streets, apparently without even being asked; 92).

In an attempt to malign the excesses of the West, Hensel's teacher depicted the West with such a bounty that citizens willingly and generously shared with one another. The easy accessibility to products in the West, compared to the East must be underscored to provide context for the meaning of this reference. Access to Western candy in the GDR was limited almost exclusively to *Intershops*. These small, government-run convenience stores had various goods from the West such as: "Seifen, die wie eine Blumenwiese rochen, Schallplatten von Duran-Duran und jede Menge Schokoriegel" ("soap, that

smelled of a blooming meadow, Duran Duran albums, and every type of chocolate candy bar”; Rusch *Meine* 88). The stores did not provide currency exchange and items could only be purchased with West German Deutschmarks (Major 190). That meant only individuals with family or friends in the West who received Deutschmarks as gifts in *Westpakets* could purchase the treats from an *Intershop* (Major 190). Twice a year Rusch’s mother would scrounge a few Deutschmarks together to purchase *Raider* (*Twix*) for her (87, Osterloh). She would rapidly devour the candy bars, but preserved the foil wrapper, pressing it between the pages of a book. Occasionally, she would take the wrapper out and “[e]s knisterte verheißungsvoll und roch genauso, wie es schmeckte. Nach Westen” ([i]t would crinkle promisingly and smelled exactly as it tasted. Like the West”; *Meine* 87).

It is important to remember when considering these memories how Assmann explains that social memories are catalogued using “retrograde strategies” (“Memory” 213). It seems clear in Rusch’s initial depiction of savoring the *Raider* and its wrapper that as a child, she longed for a future of Western abundance. But after the Wende, members of this generation “found themselves in a different social system...and they were able to evaluate their former lives in a different light...and look at the peculiarities of their socialization across the abyss of change” (Magenau and Voelkner 99). She ends this chapter that she titled “Ein Zimmer voller Raider” (“A Room full of Twix”; 86) subtly maligning the pursuit of Western decadence and, as she associates consumerism with immaturity, reveals “an acute consciousness of the absurdities of consumer culture” (Magenau and Voelkner 99).

Intra-generational Divisions

The *Mangelwirtschaft* of the GDR left an impression on Hensel a decade after reunification when shopping with a friend from the West. As she loaded the grocery store conveyer belt with only candy and Coca-Cola, her friend commented that by looking at her purchases, “könne man wirklich denken, die Mauer sei erst gestern gefallen” (“one would think that the Wall fell but yesterday”; 57-58). Her friend’s observation illustrates the lingering divide that remained after the *Wende*. He did not perceive her as someone simply with a fondness for sweets; instead he considered her childhood in the GDR and saw her as someone getting over her East German past. Hensel was sensitive to his comment and hoped that the members of the partner-generation would have *Geduld* (patience; 58) with her as she continued to adapt to life in the West. She relates encountering a dismissive attitude toward her unfaltering astonishment at her new reality as she described the ease of traveling in and around Berlin. Her western friend listened nonplussed and admitted to her “dass ihm der ganz Ostscheiß, wie er sagte, ziemlich auf die Nerven gehe” (“all that East-shit, as he said, really gets on his nerves”; Hensel 43). This is only one exchange, but the dismissiveness she seemed to feel echoes the political dynamic the former East found itself in after reunification and annexation, where they “became a permanent minority in a new political community, where the permanent majority did not share, understand, or sympathize with their particular experience and interests” (Eidlin 104). Although the members of the partner-generation did share some commonalities such as age and language, they were quite distinct from one another. In 2002, Florian Illies, an author from the former FRG, published his memoir *Generation Golf* describing the experiences of his generation that grew up in the 1970s and 1980s

and “whose identity rests firmly on the consumer artefacts (*sic*) that populated their childhood” (McCarthy 12). The publication of Hensel’s *Zonenkinder* two years later was a *Gegenstück* (counterpart) to Illies’ memoir and through the description of experiences particular to East Germany she attempted to create a collective identity for this generation as well (Dettmar 42). As more memoirs, novels, and films handled the distinctiveness of life as a former East German, the term “Generation Trabi,” emerged (Leeder 222). A reference to the East German car the Trabant was a fitting designation to mirror the name of its partner-generation, “Generation Golf,” which refers to the popular model of the compact Volkswagen car. The social dynamic between “Generation Trabi” and “Generation Golf” was intermittently at odds for “it is counterintuitive to believe that there is not a ‘deep system’ of orientations and behavioral dispositions that show effects of the old system” (Watts 484-485). Both halves of the partner-generation were the products of their childhood experiences. Hensel’s and Rusch’s memoirs provide meaningful links between what they perceive as the uniqueness of their generation’s situation and other social groups. In their effort to relate to these social groups, they are also attempting to “make themselves understandable to others” (Reich 40). They challenge their partner-generation’s assumption that they need to overcome their past, and instead illustrate that the cleft that divides their past and present, distinguishes them not only from their peers in the West, but also their parents.

Inter-generational Divisions

After the *Wende*, the relationship between this generation and its parents changed, reflecting the shifting attitude regarding consumerism, obligations, and personal priorities. The commonality of a shared history began to disappear with the fall of the

Berlin Wall (Hensel 76). The desire to be different from preceding generations is certainly not unique to this generation. But the *Wende* occurred just as they were finding ways to differentiate themselves from the parents, and offered even more ways which to detach from their parents. Ironically the frustration of dealing with her parents and their resistance to adapting to the new post-reunification reality parallels some of her interactions with her Western friends:

Warum konnten sie nicht begreifen, dass man mit einem Päckchen Kaffee, das früher jede Tür zu öffnen half und über Jahrzehnte das beliebteste Schiebergeschenk der DDR gewesen war, heute niemand mehr beeindruckt? (Why couldn't they get, that a package of coffee, that once had opened any door and for decades was the most popular gift to grease the wheels in the GDR, no longer impressed anyone?; Hensel 50).

A Päckchen Kaffee references the *Kaffee Krise* (coffee crisis) of the 1970s in Germany and doing so allows the collective memory of this *Mangelware* (scarce commodity) to demonstrate her generation's roots to its formative childhood, and its new venture and understanding of a market economy (Kleinkardt). Coffee in the GDR was scarce because of the difficulty the government had in securing coffee suppliers due to bad harvests (Kleinhardt). Tolerating inferior products had been an intergenerational unifying factor. When Hensel's parents' generation saw their children beginning to embrace Western consumerism though, "sie hatten Angst, selbst die eigenen Kinder könnten über ihr Leben richten und ihnen ihre Geschichte vorwerfen" ("they had anxiety that their own children would judge their life and reproach their history"; 54). Their history informed by years of propaganda "constantly drumming into them how successful and prosperous their

German socialist republic was supposed to be, how morally superior to the Federal Republic” (Eidlin 101) was effective at creating distrust and suspicion between parents and their children. Their refusal to change and their expectation that their children would remain unchanged after the *Wende* was based on the assumption of a continued commitment to duty because “[s]o einfach entließ man im Osten die künftigen Generationen nicht aus der Pflicht“ (“in the East, one does not easily release future generations from their obligations”; Hensel 74). This is in part of what drove the divide between the two generations deeper. Even before reunification, Western values were gaining acceptance and “as political identification declined, there was an accelerated drift on the personal level, antithetical to the official socialization of youth, toward personalistic as opposed to collective goals” (Watts 493). Hensel seemed convinced that her parents would not understand her new Western lifestyle, and thought it futile to even try to explain:

Unsere Eltern wussten nicht, wie hoch die Miete unserer Wohnungen wirklich war, wie viel das Mietauto für den Umzug gekostet hatte...und wie teuer der letzte Urlaub in Italien tatsächlich gewesen war. So wie wir sie vor unserem Leben versteckten, so versteckten wir auch unser Leben vor ihnen. (Our parents didn’t know how high our apartments’ rent was, how much the moving van cost...and how expensive our last vacation to Italy had really been. Just as we hid them from our lives, we hid our lives from them; 72).

Hensel and Rusch illustrate the inter-generational and intra-generational distinctions as they relate to everyday consumer goods. This is an effective way for people to relate to their social memory constructions. Whether or not readers of these memoirs grew up in

the GDR and had direct experience with scarcity, they can perhaps recall from their personal memories how particular foods, clothes, or music made them feel either included or excluded from different social groups.

Clothes, Collectivism, and Self-Worth

Hensel indicates that she lacked confidence in the partner-generation dynamic, especially as it related to her appearance. She studied the casual flair of classmates at university after reunification and attempted to copy their carefree style, although knowing that she didn't get it quite right:

Mitte der Neunziger, wir waren mittlerweile über fünf Jahre im Westen hatten wir noch immer nicht gelernt, uns richtig anzuziehen. Jeder sah sofort, wo wir herkamen (By the mid-nineties we had been in the West for over five years, yet we had not learned how to correctly dress ourselves. Anyone could immediately see where we came from; 60).

The awkwardness is a relatable facet common to coming-of-age stories and useful method of demonstrating "otherness" and recognition. She seems to have felt alienated and conspicuous because her clothes: "Ihre geschmackssichere Kleidung lässt mich leicht erschauern und neidvoll an meine eigene Kindheit denken" ("Their tasteful attire left me shuddering and jealous when I think of mine from my childhood"; 58). Her memory reveals more than simply a desire to fit in with her new Western peers, but also that the GDR's totalitarian aspirations and socialist system negated individual self-worth. Recalling the educational curriculum, it was designed to develop the socialist personality and was indispensable to realizing socialism in the GDR because it was ultimately focused on retaining the political and economic power within the Workers' Party (Watts

486). The nexus of ideology, politics, and economics informed curriculum and attitudes from a young age. In the socialist economy, material goods were only available as an exchange for “hard work and party loyalty” (Baylis 388). Additionally, one’s “personal fulfillment” was derived from contributing to a productive socialist economy (Watt 487). Although it could be argued that individuals should not look to political leadership to determine self-worth, the limited options, narrowly defined roles, and collectivism that was promoted from infancy through adolescence informed attitudes about self in society. Perhaps this is really at the center of the divide between the two halves of the partner-generation; they were approaching the new generational partnership with a different attitude toward individual self-worth in the market economy, both as producers and consumers. In the West, teens had more freedom to explore personal interests, which was often accompanied by “high levels of...disposable income and self determination” (Watts 487). In the GDR however, “youth as a life stage...was seen more as a transitional phase from childhood to productive adulthood than as an autonomous phase with intrinsic worth” (Watts 486). In a system that valued collectivization, individual goals and desires only distracted from common goals. Abnegation became part of the East German ethos and was symbolized in their attire. Rusch recalls the *Wunsch nach Unauffälligkeit* (desire for inconspicuousness; *Meine* 35) and Hensel remembers that she made the expectations of others a priority so that she could remain *unerkannt* (unrecognized; 91):

Wenn ich meine guten Sachen nur zu den Familienferien und im Theater, aber nicht in der Schule trug, dann war das in jedem Falle besser, als wenn über mich gesprochen worden wäre. Überhaupt, es sollte kein Gerede entstehen. Nicht auffallen und immer Durchschnitt bleiben (If I wore my good clothes to a family

celebration or in the theater, but not in school, that was in any case better than having people talk about me. Absolutely no talk should arise: to not be noticed and to always remain average; 91).

Again, this stands in direct contrast to the attitude in the West where “a significant part of self-fulfillment and personal development occurs in ‘free time,’ and is pursued in an environment rich in material and personal alternatives” (Watt 487). After the *Wende*, young East Germans seemed to be conflicted about who they had to be as former citizens of the GDR, and who they were permitted to become in a unified Germany.

Rusch’s recollection of her *Jugendweihe* ceremony illustrates that the conflicts in generational identity existed long before reunification. She begins with the seemingly superficial question related to a teenage experience: “Die entscheidende Frage der Jugendweihe lautete nämlich ‘Was ziehst du an?’” (“The crucial question of the *Jugendweihe* was, ‘what are you going to wear?’”; Rusch *Meine* 48). But then she indicates how one’s choice could be seen as a political statement. Not only did the bright-green shade of her dress set her apart from her classmates clad only in black, red, or white, but the dress she wore to the ceremony was sent from a family friend in the West. The fabric and style would not have gone unnoticed and it was subtly subversive to wear a dress produced in the West to a ceremony celebrating SED party loyalty. Often in her memoir, Rusch attempts to differentiate herself from her peers, while still presenting typical experiences of growing up in the GDR. As mentioned in the last chapter, when Rusch was quite young, her mother sent her to school with a political patch sown to her jacket sleeve in solidarity with those protesting the armament build-up in Eastern Europe.

Her parents were friends with Easter German political dissident Robert Havemann⁵ and throughout various times in her life, Rusch felt like an *Außenseiterkind* (outsider child; *Meine* 49) because of the choices her parents made. The day of the *Jugendweihe* was no different. She remembers the appearances of her father and stepfather: “Während der Zeremonie saß ich zwischen meinen beiden Vätern. Uniform links, Jeans rechts...[d]er glattrasierte Krieger und der langhaarige Verweigerer“ (During the ceremony I sat between my two fathers. Uniform on the left, Jeans on the right...the clean-shaven soldier and the long-haired resister; Rusch *Meine* 50). The attire of Rusch’s father and stepfather symbolized their politics. Her father dressed in his *National Volksarmee* uniform represented defending the status quo, while her long-haired stepfather symbolized the *Trotzidentität* persona, or attaching one’s identity to the resistance movement of the GDR (Leeder 219). This excerpt provides an opportunity to consider that although there are several factors that insulate a particular generation from preceding and successive generations, within any one generation there are numerous different social groups with which one may identify. Within the confines of a tightly controlled society, what may emerge are amplified personae, in which identifying characteristics are often revealed through attire and are used to communicate one’s interests, beliefs, or associations. It is not the intent of this study to dismiss the relevance of these distinctions, but rather I choose to focus on the broader structure of generational identity because the *Wende* intensified the shifting of the “invisible framework of shared experiences, hopes,

⁵ As a noted physicist and active member of the SED, Havemann lost his position in the party for protesting against the H-Bomb. He left Berlin after he was dismissed from his teaching position at Humboldt University and moved to a small village in the far North of the GDR, where he remained under constant surveillance (Havemann 37, Rusch 16).

values, and obsessions” of this generation as politics and economies shifted too (Assmann “Memory” 214). It was the commonalities within the generation vis-à-vis the differences of other generations and peer groups that provided this generation a channel to relate to one another.

In this chapter, I considered how Hensel and Rusch depict the aspect of opposition as an informative aspect of their generational identity and the dynamic changes between their parents and their expanding peer group in the West. The product scarcity that citizens in the GDR experienced informed their reactions to the variety and accessibility of market goods they encountered after the *Wende*. Their responses to an abundance of market options put them at odds with their peers who had little interest or understanding of the disorientation the *Wende* created for their peers. Additionally, with every step members of this generation took toward a more western lifestyle, the further the divide grew between themselves and their parents. Even as economic and social factors that influenced this generation changed, the formative affects of the socialist personality left, at the very least, a residual barrier to unification. Now that I have presented how and why this generation sees itself as distinct and uniquely situated, I will consider what role this plays in the *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* (dealing with the past) after reunification and the consequences it has on commemoration, national identity, and current politics.

Chapter 3

Memories and Future Action

Narratives and rituals can be combined in the praxis of bolstering or undermining established institutions of power and subjugation. Origin stories, as a specific form of narrative, appear in many genres of popular literature from Greek mythology to comic books and provide audiences essential backstories which elucidate causality for a protagonist's present circumstance. Similarly, patriotic commemorations can be used to celebrate storied beginnings of nationhood as they promote the sustainment of the current political leadership. The repetitive rhetoric of the GDR's anti-fascist *raison d'être* was touted in the educational and political institutions and reinforced by national commemorations. In any story or commemoration there is both a selection of the facts on which to focus and an interpretation as to what those assembled facts ultimately mean. When the selection, editing, and interpreting of facts are employed to maintain a political regime that is unpopular and fails to act in the interests of its people, these types of remembrances contain elements of propaganda that can ultimately delegitimize and unravel power structures. Such a confluence of commemoration and rejection are observable within the GDR. On October 7, 1989 SED General Secretary Erich Honecker and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev observed the pomp of GDR's 40th *Tag der Republik*, an annual celebration of the GDR's establishment. As military processions paraded through Berlin, demonstrators took to nearby streets demanding governmental change, their grievances amplified as protesters also organized in the East German cities of Plauen, Dresden, and Leipzig (Schmemmann; Schlegel). The popular acceptance of the established power structures of the Communist Bloc nations was faltering and a month

later on November 9, 1989 the Peaceful Revolution resulted in the *Mauerfall*, open German borders, and sweeping economic and political change.

The selectivity of reinforced memory and meaning are observable not only on an institutional level, but also on a much smaller scale as it relates to individuals and generations. This was something Hensel and Rusch contended with as they wrote their memoirs: who has the authority to evaluate the past and can there be an objective engagement with lived experiences? Their generation was the subject of external evaluations, in which selected details from life in the GDR became the blame for contemporary circumstances, resulting in reductionist portrayals of their generation. Just as national identity is reinforced through commemoration, contemporary depictions based on past identifiers could become the basis for future ambitions and collective action. As Hensel and Rusch sift through the past and relate anecdotes which detail life in the GDR, their quasi-origin stories reveal a mixed sediment of public and private experiences, which enables and prevents understanding self and society. The inherent tension between these contradictions is common among coming-of-age stories. When placed within the context of the GDR, the political and existential aspects stand out more starkly. In this chapter, I will consider how these memoirs challenge *Außenwahrnehmungen* (external perceptions; Engler and Hensel 37) of their generation, how frameworks of institutional power continued to affect this generation's sense of identity after the *Wende*, and the consequences this has on future conceptions of generational and national identity.

The Persisting Gap between the East and West

Longstanding antagonism between East and West Germany receded from dominance during the first efforts to unify. But the hurried enthusiasm of reunification

waned during the *Aufbaujahren* as high levels of unemployment, unfamiliar educational standards, and racially motivated hate crimes expanded through regions of the former GDR (Jarausch 2009). Although there was “a struggle between a desire for positive national identity on the one hand, and attempts to maintain a critical discussion about the German past on the other” (Thesz “Dangerous” 2), continued reference to *Ossis* and *Wessis* in popular media indicated the persisting divide between the West and East and was an impediment to unification (Schneider 136). In the “Konstruktion gegensätzlicher kollektiver Identitäten” (construction of opposing collective identities; Schneider 133) the former divisions were revived and the pejorative terms *Jammerossi* and *Besserwessi* became part of the vernacular (Schneider 136; “Wer sagt noch Jammerossi und Besserwessi?”). These invectives relate the popular perceptions of the first decade after reunification, which associated the East with whining and complaining (*jammern*) and the West with an attitude of superiority (*besser*) and condescension. Thirty years into a unified Germany these terms no longer hold the same social currency, but during the first decade after reunification, these terms perpetuated stereotypes that had begun before the *Wende* (“Wer sagt noch Jammerossi und Besserwessi?”). Even if these distinctions did not influence how historians and sociologists researched and developed their ideas, it did influence how a divided public received their determinations.

In 1999, West German criminologist Christian Pfeiffer asserted that specific methods of GDR’s educational system were responsible for the spike in xenophobic crimes (Rusch *Aufbau* 73). He based his theory on tactics used in the GDR to model the behavior of young children to align with the socialist principle of collectivism, which he claimed reduces the worth of individual identity (Rusch *Aufbau* 74). Not only did his

controversial theory foreshadow the decades-long dialogue about Germany's persistent problem with xenophobic right-wing extremism that continues to grow (Chase and Goldberg), it also illustrates the influence that Western-dominated evaluations had on perceptions of former East Germans. Pfeiffer's conclusions were controversial and met with public outcry, especially from former GDR citizens. A public debate was organized at St. Paul's Church in Magdeburg, and excerpts from the transcript illustrate that members were not only incensed by the content of Pfeiffer's thesis, but found his analysis impertinent. As one attendee declared:

Ich finde es weiterhin unerträglich, daß wir Bürger aus den ostdeutschen Ländern uns heute noch 10 Jahre nach der Wende von Westdeutschen darüber belehren lassen müssen, wie wir gelebt, wie wir gearbeitet und, vor allem auch, wie wir unsere Kinder erzogen haben (I still find it intolerable, that ten years after reunification, we as citizens of the East German regions, must be lectured to by West Germans, about how we lived, how we worked, and above all, how we raised our kids; Althammer and Bernert).

Many of the assessments coming from the West about former East Germans were critical, especially in an attempt to find the source of criminal behavior and racist attitudes.

Attempting to redress escalating hate crimes is important, but critics in the East could see the negative consequences of too readily maligning their past. Wolfgang Engler, a German sociologist and co-author of *Wer Wir Sind: Die Erfahrung, ostdeutsch zu sein* (*Who We Are: The Experience of being East German*) with *Zonenkinder* author Jana Hensel, addresses the power structure of the historical narrative during Germany's *Aufbaujahren*: "Indem man die Herkunftsgesellschaft der Ostdeutschen für jegliches

kritikwürdiges Verhalten verantwortlich macht, legitimiert man die strukturellen Gebrechen und Ungerechtigkeiten der Ankunftsgesellschaft” (When one holds the social background of the East Germans responsible for everything that is worthy of criticism, one legitimizes the structural deficiencies and injustices of the society, which just arrived”; 51). Even if an investigation of plausible explanations is not intended to malign, cause and effect oversimplifies an issue and enables the iniquities of power to continue, if not amplify them. As such, a more balanced approach to history and a consideration of the magnitude and variation in mediating factors that contribute to a population’s history and identity is beneficial for a more nuanced and productive understanding. This is in part why Engler and Hensel both advocate for making a distinction between the *DDR-Erfahrung* (GDR-experience) and the *ostdeutsche Erfahrung* (East German Experience; Engler and Hensel 54).

History and Power

Insights derived from their judgment point to an important distinction between institutions and collectives of individuals within a society. In particular, there are important differences to be made between the GDR (i.e., the network of all institutional power) and East Germans (i.e., the collective of individuals living within and under that network). While there are interconnections between the two, conflating them or reducing one into the other results in misunderstanding and misdiagnosing the lessons and insights one might beneficially draw. This holds important implications for conflicting narrations about German reunification.

Rusch dedicates a chapter in her second book, *Aufbau Ost: Unterwegs zwischen Zinnowitz und Zwickau* (*Constructing the East: Along the Way Between Zinnowitz and*

Zwickau)⁶, to Pfeiffer's theory. She readily acknowledged the increased number of right-wing extremists, especially in the regions of the former GDR and even thought that his assessment had some validity as she reflected on her experience with school discipline (*Aufbau* 75). But she expressed concern that placing the blame for the uptick in *Rechtsradikale* attitudes and crimes on the former educational system of the SED could absolve those individuals of their personal responsibility. If the SED had built such a consistent, comprehensive system of harsh disciplinary measures that children across the GDR were subjected to, why Rusch asks, had membership in these groups stayed a minority of the population (*Aufbau* 79)? What is notable about Rusch's viewpoint is that she provides a balance between providing relatable accounts from her youth in the GDR, finding ways to communicate with her contemporaries, but yet preserves individual accountability for personal choices and future action.

Emerging narrations about reunified Germany and the former GDR were dominated by *Außenwahrnehmungen*, which failed to present *Innenperspektive* of lived experiences of life in the GDR. There could be a potential compromise to the objectivity of historical accounts, but previously inaccessible insights from the "inside" are indispensable for better understanding (Engler and Hensel 39). Hensel explains how after reunification, she was "mit westdeutschem Wissen bombardiert," ("bombarded with West German knowledge"; Engler and Hensel 50) in her history classes at school. The outside perspective was inconsistent with what she had personally experienced and was

⁶ This title does not offer an easy translation to English because the word *Aufbau* may refer to an existing structure/composition of something, or it may refer to the process of structuring/reconstruction. I interpret Rusch's intent with this title to mean that the East is still in the process of developing after the *Wende*, and for this reason decide to use "constructing" rather than the more static translation of "construction."

simply “nicht unsere Geschichte” (“not our history”; Engler and Hensel 50). Throughout *Zonenkinder*, Hensel responds to being marginalized and gives her account a measure of authority by narrating in the plural. This has been one of the largest critiques of her memoir: that she had the audacity to speak for an entire generation (Kraushaar 98). In response to the criticisms regarding her use of the word *wir* (we) in *Zonenkinder*, she explains her decision as a means of achieving empowerment, and that “ich brauchte dieses “Wir”. Um eine Identität zu markieren, einen kollektiven Erfahrungsraum, den man uns ja vorher abgesprochen hatte” (“I needed that “we”. To mark an identity, a collective space of experience that previously we had been denied”; Engler and Hensel 48). Hensel asserts that *Zonenkinder* relies on generation-specific accounts, which were drawn from personal experiences in order to communicate with her peers. If readers get hung up on small anecdotal details, she argues, they may miss the larger phenomenon that it provides: a *Diskussionsgrundlage* (basis for discussion; Kraushaar 96-97). Hensel communicated with her contemporaries by way of social memories grounded in a familiar realm in an attempt to give voice to a marginalized perspective. Such a polyvocality suggests a genealogical view of history.

In Foucault’s development of Nietzsche’s idea of genealogy, he rejects a linear conception of historiography that seeks singular causality for events. Instead a genealogy recognizes the influence of power on constructions of the past, leading to disparate, multiple, or even contradictory versions of the past (Garland 372). Power does not necessarily emerge from a conventionally conceived “top-down” authority, but instead “there are irreducibly multiple and heterogeneous forms of power flowing in every direction within the social fabric” (Medina 10). As these authors cultivated a sense of

generational identity, they also informed this sense of genealogy. Their *Innenperspektives* shared from their social and collective memories maneuvered them into a larger conversation and with every additional layered perspective, the power dynamic was leveled in small measure.

Typically, people have vast catalogues of memories stored up from even the most mundane events in their lives. Many memories are “procedural” and allow us to perform everyday activities and follow social norms with ease (Assmann, “Memory 211). But when memories are invoked to help individuals communicate with their contemporaries, this is a type of *Funktionsgedächtnis* (functional memory; Dettmar 42). And in sharing these memories, an individual has either an expressed or implicit intention. Although the two memoirs I have focused on differ in tone and style, they both present anecdotal stories detailing what it was like to grow up in the GDR and the lasting effects these experiences had on each of them individually. Perhaps Hensel and Rusch, as products of the GDR, were especially attuned to the limitations of official historical narrative and the consequence of marginalization. They were familiar with the control of history and how it is used to legitimate political power. Given this experience with institutionalization, it is useful to explore specific aspects of memory mediation.

Considering once again Assmann’s classifications of memory formats, much of what Hensel and Rusch relate are social memories, as they are based on their individual experiences, but put into a social context to communicate with their readers. Memories that are not based on first-hand experience but are mediated include political and cultural memory. These are constructions of the past that become incorporated into a sense of national and cultural identity, without having to have been lived or experienced. This is

especially germane as it relates to major historical events, as media coverage is so comprehensive “we have no definite way of knowing whether something that we remember is an experiential memory of an episode that has been told [to] us by others and was incorporated into our fund of memories” (Assmann “Memory” 222). Not only does an individual emplot her memories to the historical framework, but mediation fills in missing details. Hensel considers this as she reflects on the rush of news after

Mauerfall:

Ich weiß selbst auch nicht mehr genau, was ich mit eigenen Augen und was ich,
an diesem Abend zum ersten und dann unzählige Male später, in den
Tagesthemen sah (I don’t know exactly what I saw with my own eyes and what I
then saw that evening for the first time and then countless times after in the
nightly news; Hensel 12).

This demonstrates how easily a mediated depiction of an event may slip into our memories. We don’t necessarily control what perspectives we incorporate into our personal “fund of memories.” The process of exclusion and inclusion is executed on an external level by media outlets, publishers, and government agencies and then refined by our own sensemaking and attachments.

In one of her many treatments of social and collective memory constructions, Assmann explains that memory and identity share a “circular relationship,” each informing the other: “die Erinnerungen, die ausgewählt werden, die Identität der Gruppe stärken, und die Identität der Gruppe die Erinnerungen befestigt” (“the selected memories strengthen the group and the identity of the group attaches/reinforces the memories”; “Soziales” 2). This “circular relationship” suggests a degree of insularity. To an extent,

Hensel and Rusch continue the marginalization, highlighting the peculiarity of their generation, rather than acknowledging universal existential themes between the East and West. Perhaps the intensified attachment to their formative years was a necessary step in asserting a place in the historiography of reunified Germany.

For Hensel, an intensification of belonging emerged as the security and familiarity of the GDR was lost. The rapid replacement of her recognizable East German life with a varied and strange bounty of products from the West, which were found in shops and on streets with unfamiliar names, left her without a sense of direction: “weil unsere Kindheit ein Museum ohne Namen ist, fehlen mir die Worte dafür; weil das Haus keine Adresse hat, weiß ich nicht, welchen Weg ich einschlagen soll” (because our childhood is a museum without a name, I can’t find the words for it; because the house does not have an address, I don’t know which way I should set out for”; 25). Our expectations for the future are born of memories and shared experiences. One makes plans based on what has occurred in the past. If future conceptions of self are predicated on what one has already experienced, the *Wende* shifted expectations as new opportunities and hardships disrupted the familiar trajectory. Memories are a way for this generation to communicate and it was in the process of reflecting on their personal and collective origin stories that the GDR “emerges now after its disappearance as a common cultural denominator and basis for communication amongst those left behind” (Magenau and Voelkner 99).

Commemoration and Future Action

While the facts of the past cannot be changed, they are always open to continued reinterpretation. How Germans want to proceed with a national identity is revealed in the recent commemorations. In November 2019, the *Berliner Senatsverwaltung für Kultur*

und Europa (Berlins Senate Office for culture and Europe) held a seven-day event where visitors were invited to “learn, remember, debate and celebrate” the thirty-year anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution and *Mauerfall* (“30 Years Peaceful Revolution”). The inclusion of “debate” into a commemorative celebration acknowledges that historical interpretations are mutable. The *Wende* is still recent enough that there are still several generations alive that can participate in this commemoration having had first-hand experience. Commemoration allows for past generations to transmit “cultural values” to successive generations and additionally provides a means for one to “realize himself in history” (Klapwilk 51). This is a departure from Germany’s tradition of commemorations and monumental history in which “many of the differences must be neglected, the individuality of the past forced into a general formula, and all sharp angles broken off for the sake of correspondence” (Nietzsche qtd. in Lang 291). Although last year’s commemoration in Berlin may indicate that there is now more inclusion than during previous eras, commemoration is not the determining factor in generational or national identity. For an outsider, commemorative events provide a way to audit the disparity between an idealized sense of national identity and the actual features of a national identity such as educational standards, economic and professional opportunities, religious affiliation, and political participation. In recent years, the disquieting dissent of right-wing radicals, who have found a home in the political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD), has stymied a unified German identity. The party’s platform opposes Angela Merkel’s liberal policies on migration, appeals for tightly controlled borders, and minimizes the Holocaust. With the highest polling numbers in the Eastern States of the former GDR (Chase and Goldberg), this party’s demographics draw

attention once again to this lingering divide between the East and West. Who or what should be held accountable for the appeal to right-wing extremism in these regions? Hensel's and Rusch's memoirs help to temper the appeal of narrowly focusing blame on a single institutional practice. Mediation of memories again seems to be an important determining factor for how future generations will extract meaning from Germany's past. Does the openness and inclusion of the thirty-year anniversary commemoration indicate that memories will be mediated with balanced nuance, allowing a constructive understanding of historical events to emerge? Or perhaps the ever-present scourge of extremism suggests that "we are merely the resultant of previous generations...their errors, passions, and crimes; it is impossible to shake off this chain. Though we condemn the errors and think we have escaped them, we cannot escape the fact that we spring from them" (Nietzsche 21). At times the intractable nature of history dominates what an individual focuses on for meaning. But as fear or uncertainty gives way to hope, solutions to divisions may emerge. In their memoirs, Jana Hensel and Claudia Rusch demonstrate the benefit in attempting to reconcile the momentous circumstances that transpired during their adolescence with the challenges of establishing a unique and meaningful identity. Their subsequent publications suggest that this is not an exercise neatly concluded in a single effort, but one that requires sustained toil.

Conclusion

Transition and reflection marked the years that followed Germany's reunification. For young former East Germans, who were coming of age during this era, these contemplations were especially poignant, conflicted, and consequential. Expressing various degrees of disorientation and sentimentality, the boom of generational depictions regarding the *Wende* provides layered interior views of life in the former GDR. In their memoirs, Hensel and Rusch focus on the formative years of their youth as they relate their first-hand experience of life in the GDR and after. As they attempt to discern meaning from the past and distill significance from memories, they attach them to historical timelines and illustrate the lasting influence that GDR institutions left on their generational identity.

In order to critically engage with the institutional influences that shaped and constrained this generation's identity as depicted in these memoirs, I used concepts and terminology developed by Aleida Assmann as a framework for examining the distinctions between individual and social memory. Extending the work of Ricoeur and Mannheim, Assmann explains that as social memories are employed to a historical narrative, they are shared and become an important part of intergenerational communication. As the mundane events of our daily lives are interrupted with events of historic importance, such as Germany's *Wende*, we attach our personal stories to that moment or era, allowing us to relate with others about it. Hensel and Rusch employed their social memories to the historical narrative constructed by the GDR, which it used as a means to legitimize its claim to authority. The GDR maintained the initial rhetoric of anti-fascism from its roots as a Soviet-occupied zone in which Communist party leaders

claimed their Marxist ideology to be the ideological barrier to the threat of resurgent National Socialism. The resulting socialist economic and political systems of the GDR supported a strong workers' party. Developing a "socialist personality" was imperative to creating future party members and maintaining the authority of the SED. Because of the GDR's "totalitarian aspirations" it established a comprehensive network of institutions designed to provide a thorough indoctrination of party ideology. Child-care provided at *Kinderkrippen*, curriculum at elementary and secondary schools, and extracurricular organizations such as the *Pioniere* and FDJ were all designed to develop a particular worldview used to promote a historical legacy and political ideology.

The institutional influence that informed this generation's identity occurred on two different levels. The first took place when they were children and their experiences were informed by SED rhetoric, which had been designed to inform cultural and political memory and, in turn a scripted national identity. This is illustrated when as children they identified as anti-fascists although they were three generations removed from WWII.

Hensel and Rusch describe their participation in quintessential activities such as membership in the *Pioniere*, the FDJ, and the quasi-confirmation celebration *Jugendweihe*. With these recollections, they contribute to a catalog of familiar experiences to which members of this generation relate.

The second layer of institutional influence was a residual mindset that left its impression years after the *Wende*. These impressions from their socialist upbringing continued to inform how they perceive the past from their contemporary perspectives. Their memoirs suggest that they were not equipped to think outside of a collectivist construct; self-determination and self-worth were concepts incompatible with the

socialist personality with which they were raised. This complicated this generation's relationship to its "partner generation" from the West. The seismic economic, political, and cultural changes that East Germans experienced during the *Wende* registered less significantly for many of their peers. And as this generation gained familiarity with Western ideas and products, a growing disconnect widened between them and their parents. The inability to relate either *inter*-generationally or *intra*-generationally prompted these authors to define generational identity during a time that was initially focused on unification.

In response to the external perceptions by West Germans regarding the former GDR and its citizens, I considered the power-dynamic that emerges when a group feels marginalized and excluded from participating in the narration of their past. Searching for causality in history leads one to dredge through the detritus of recent events, looking for promising solution to contemporary problems. But external views distill causality too simply, disregarding nuanced features and maintaining power structures. First-hand accounts broaden historical narratives, demonstrating that history need not be stodgy and static timeline, but flexible and dynamic. Although memoirs and retrospectives depict unique aspects of an era and may initially seem to hinder unification, diverse perspectives eventually help to foster richer discourse in which polyvocality becomes a natural and necessary part of reflecting generational and national identity.

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